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Book Review of Narcotics and the Law

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NARCOTICS AND THE LAW

By WILLIAM BUTLER ELDRIDGE. Chicago: American Bar Foundation, 1962, xiv, 204 pp.

This small volume is an excellent survey of the research which has been done in this country in regard to narcotics, the conclusions reached as to solution of problems, and the present status of thinking on the subject. A seven-page bibliography is appended, as is a table showing the criminal penalties in the various states. One commencing to do serious work in the field could probably find no better way to begin than to go over this survey.

The book is the result of more than a year of study and interviews by a research attorney of the American Bar Foundation. The discussion is limited almost entirely to opiates and their synthetics. The author states: "Other drugs present questions requiring a totally different approach on the part of the researcher, whether he be lawyer, physician, psychiatrist, or sociologist." If this were true as to each drug, the situation would be almost hopeless, as every newspaper reader knows that new habit-forming drugs are appearing constantly, possibly the most recent being glue for model airplanes. However, the author's statement seems to be a too modest appraisal of his work and of the significance to be attached to the proposals which he makes. Basically habit-forming drugs are a social problem, and regardless of mechanical differences in their methods of operation the same general principles of social control will apply.

One who has not been familiar with the field is impressed by the tremendous amount of work which has been done and the small results which have been achieved—even satisfactory statistics are not available. This sort of thing is sometimes inherent in behavioral research, particularly when as a foregone conclusion the conduct under investigation must be regarded as evil—how can proper consideration be given the highly controversial proposal that addicts be furnished a free supply.

The one conclusion unanimously concurred in in this country has been that the correct approach is that of criminal sanctions, but there has been "a recent surge of objection to the pre-

vailing system by competent, sincere and conscientious people" who feel that present policies are inhumane and ineffective.

Study of the problem is also made more difficult when to be effective it must be participated in by lawyers, doctors, scientists, social workers, commercial interests, legislators, and law enforcement officials. All the difficulties in the way of research emphasize the importance of a stock-taking broad survey of the past, the present, and recommendations as to the future, such as this book undertakes. It will help to lay the foundation for future properly coordinated efforts. The President's Advisory Commission on Narcotic and Drug Abuse is also a step in the right direction.

Two conclusions seem indisputably sound: that judges should be free to individualize sentences; and that parole and probation should be utilized, as with other offenses, to promote rehabilitation and prevent recidivism.

This book has one great shortcoming—almost completely ignoring the experience and thinking of other countries. This is particularly unfortunate in dealing with a social problem as ancient and universal as the abuse of narcotics. We should even consider the views of those who may believe that benefit can be derived from the habitual use of such drugs. It is conceivable that we might discover values which should be conserved. At any rate, the next step would seem to be a similar book from a world standpoint.

The preparation of a book with a world viewpoint will be facilitated by what has already been done in the United Nations. There have been multilateral drug treaties, and the Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs was adopted by the conference for that purpose March 25, 1961. It will go in force when acted upon favorably by forty countries, and it is hoped that this will be accomplished in 1964. In the meantime the Commission on Narcotic Drugs of the Economic and Social Council, the Permanent Central Opium Board, and the Drug Supervisory Body are continuing to function.

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